



DR. MATT A. BISCEGLIA

02/01/10

Dear Cromwell Community Members,

Like all Connecticut communities, the Cromwell Public Schools (CPS) are immersed in this year's very complicated budget process. It's difficult to believe that a little less than a year ago CPS emerged from one of the most trying budgetary cycles in recent memory with almost all programs and personnel in tact. In retrospect one can readily see that this was brought about in part by a perfect storm of medical benefits and energy savings, early retirement initiatives, and individual school reductions which allowed us, at least on the surface, to begin the 09-10 school year where we left off. Arguably, the outside observer can assume that the approved funding has been sufficient these last two years, and rightfully so as the district continues to demonstrate progress in any number of benchmark areas. The reality however, is much more subtle and less visible to the casual bystander. The internal demands on the entire system, whether on the personnel or resource side of the ledger, have increased in ways that reveal the need for a more robust fiscal safeguard for the approaching third year of these fiscally challenging times.

Specifically, we have seen the demands on our special education department continue to expand through increased identification of learning disabled students, special education tuition, and special education transportation, all federally and state mandated requirements. And while we've done an excellent job in anticipating and budgeting for as many of these contingencies as possible, it is becoming increasingly impossible to keep up with the financial demand. However, special education is just one aspect of the CPS budget. Level or limited funding increases during the last two (2) years are more and more shaping our decisions regarding personnel and programs. When combined with an anticipated 3rd consecutive year of level of funding, discretionary spending and investment in district-wide school improvement initiatives become more and more improbable.

As you can see in the data that follows, some very difficult decisions are on the table for us as we begin putting the finishing touches on our original 2010-2011 education budget request of \$26,335,497, a 5.34% increase over the 2009-2010 budget.

<b>Major Increases to the 2010-2011 Education Budget as of 01/16/10</b>		
<b>1. Benefits (Med., unemployment, pension)</b>	<b>\$690,863</b>	<b>+17.22%</b>
<b>2. Salaries (Cert.)</b>	<b>\$411,714</b>	<b>+ 3.07%</b>
<b>3. Instructional Equip.</b>	<b>\$147,192</b>	<b>+491.38%</b>
<b>4. Energy &amp; Utilities</b>	<b>\$ 94,100</b>	<b>+10.89%</b>
<b>5. Salaries (Non-cert.)</b>	<b>\$ 63,206</b>	<b>+ 2.11 %</b>
<b>6. Other Purchased Serv.</b>	<b>\$ 45,725</b>	<b>+22.07%</b>
<b>7. Transportation</b>	<b>\$ 28,600</b>	<b>+ 3.88%</b>
<b>Total \$</b>		<b>1,481,400</b>

Although these seven areas alone represent an increase of 5.92% when compared to last year's budget, we have been able to reduce this to the original 5.34% proposed increase because of the significant reductions in a number of other line items. We are also very cognizant of the fact that a 5.34% budget request would be a difficult sell to the community even in the best of times. Therefore, to mitigate the kind of harmful personnel and program reductions that are becoming more and more commonplace around the state, I have proposed a number of budget reducing initiatives again this year that, if agreed upon by all CPS personnel, will serve to significantly reduce our final budget request, yet keep us within striking distance of where we are today re: personnel and programs.

These initiatives include:

- ❖ District-wide furlough days for everyone;
- ❖ An early retirement plan for eligible certified staff;
- ❖ More faculty and staff moving to the High Deductable Health Plan (HDHP) option;
- ❖ A move by eligible unions to the managed (generic) prescription benefit; and
- ❖ Consolidation of some district resources and services (e.g., bussing).

As I mentioned in last month's letter, I have reached agreement in principle with all seven (7) individual contract holders and one (1) union for three unpaid furlough days next year and I am still in discussions with the other six (6) unions. In light of next year's projected increases in medical benefits and anticipated energy and negotiated salary increases as delineated in the preceding table, it is abundantly clear that we will need concessions from all of the remaining unions to help defray these costs so as to remain within a reasonable educational budget proposal for the 10-11 school year.

Unfortunately, without concessions across the board, we could well be looking at personnel reductions on the order of 25-30 certified and non-certified positions, leaving the Administration and Board of Education with the complex process of determining specific reductions in personnel and programs.

In conclusion, I remain optimistic that all parties will come to the table in a spirit of shared responsibility and cooperation and do what is best for the students in the Cromwell Public Schools. Again, I encourage each of you to become engaged in the budget process by attending our budget meetings held at 7:00 P.M. at the Cromwell High School Media Center. Please visit our district or school websites at [www.cromwell.k12.ct.us](http://www.cromwell.k12.ct.us) for budget meeting dates and agendas.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Matt A. Bisceglia  
Superintendent of Schools